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### Sodium Chlorate—A Fire Hazard

Persons who use a weed killer and defoliant known as sodium chlorate, used mainly in southern States and California, may be seriously burned by clothing fires unless they take proper precautions.

The chemical is used to kill a weed known as Johnson grass and as a defoliant by cotton growers. The danger of misusing sodium chlorate was reported to the Public Health Service by investigators in a State health project in southeast Missouri to prevent burns. The project grant is directed by the Injury Control Program of the National Center for Urban and Industrial Health in Cincinnati. Project investigators have been studying burns from various causes in the counties of New Madrid, Pemiscot, Butler, Stoddard, Scott, and Mississippi.

Sodium chlorate may be made less dangerous by mixing it with fire retardant solutions such as sodium metaborate. Sodium chlorate is sold in many compounds containing varying strengths of the chemical and under many trade names. The fire hazard varies with the strength of the solution. Users of the spray should remove any clothing contaminated by the spray and have it laundered as soon as possible. The directions on the container should be read before the chemical is used.

Sodium chlorate itself will not burn and is moderately toxic to a human being; however, when heated the material gives off oxygen, adding greatly to the flammability of any combustible material present. In one incident a child carried pellets of sodium chlorate in his pocket, and friction between materials in the pocket and the pellets ignited his trousers. When used as a spray, any clothing that comes in contact with the chemical becomes highly flammable.